

MEDICAL PHILATELY: an overview

Bowed down by the tedium of the "*trivial round and common task.....*", practising doctors tend to forget the excitement that was inherent in the medicine of their student days. At that time, we discovered that the practise of medicine brings us into contact with all facets of Life, and thus all Creation can have a relevance to its practitioners.

It is just so with medical philately. The subject embraces a vast variety of subjects, from Anthropology through Leprosy to Zoology. It depends purely on your field of interest as to the assembling choices that you, the collector, will make. Surely, there can never be a reason for boredom with a topic that is essentially infinite in its scope ?

There is no established "must" about the manner in which to approach medical philately. Indeed, if the hobby is adopted to find release and "free up" the mind, I believe that it is essential not to embrace another dogma. I have tabulated some suggestions for those about to indulge in the subject (**table I**). But they are just that, only suggestions.

TABLE I : An Overview of Medical Philately

Stamps	The Generalist
Themes	Biographies eg. Virchow, Rudolf Ludwig Karl (1821-1902)
	Charity Stamps eg. Belgium's Anti-tuberculosis Fund surcharged stamps
	Disease entities eg. Dermatosyphilately
	General topics eg. Pharmaceutical Philately
	Medical history eg. Physiology and Medical Nobel laureates
Postal history	eg. International Red Cross Society and wartime mail
	Cinderella's eg. Pharmaceutical tax stamps
Perfins	
Medical Cachets	
	Post-office Slogan cancellations

To the generalist, all things are grist to the mill, the topic is endless, with many a highway and by-way to waylay one. The danger here is that the collector commonly feels that he is making no headway - which becomes a burden in itself. On the other hand, taking a "theme" and philatelically exploring the topic to the full can be extremely rewarding to the closet collector, the exhibitionist and the doctor-banker alike. For instance, "Nurses on Stamps" encourages one to read of Cavell and Cruz, Neri and Nightingale; to consider the role of the nurse in the prevention of disease, the alleviation of suffering and promotion of health; or to do a "Who's Who" on the portrait of South Africa's

Definitive wartime bantum 1d. or Ciskei's 8c. Cecelia Makiwane (**illust 1**).

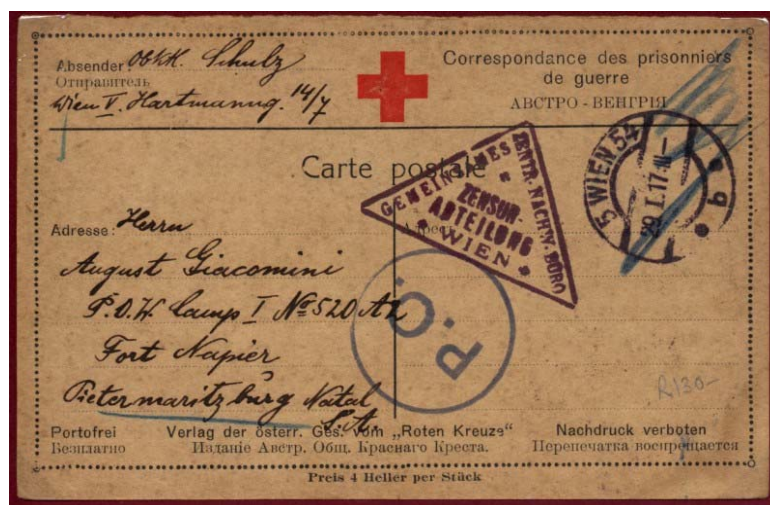


Mrs. F C Friedlander, South Africa SG. Cat. No. 98



Cecelia Makiwane, Ciskei SG. Cat. No. 88

Postal stationery increasingly is developing as a field of worth-while interest. For instance : the International Red Cross Society has long played a role in ensuring postal communication across international boundaries during times of warfare and civil unrest. Each document either holds a secret or tells a tale. Specialising in the accumulation of such material has led to the creation of some internationally-renowned collections (**illust 2**).



Red Cross Prisoner-of-War correspondence from Vienna, Austria to Fort Napier, Natal dated January 1917

Cinderellas are stamps produced for reasons other than postal usage. In the realm of medical philately, the Russian "Zemstvo" medicine stamps, the Prince of Wales's Hospital Fund for London, New Zealand Patriotic labels and the South African SANTA "Christmas" stamps can "legitimately" be included in a thematic collection(illustr 3).



Prince of Wales's Hospital Fund for London, 1897

perkins are that group of stamps that have holes punctured through them as a deterrent against theft, and to denote ownership by a state department or by public or private concerns. Those belonging to such organisations as the Salvation Army are difficult to acquire and often attract substantial premiums.

A cachet is an embossed, hand-stamped or machine-printed devise marked on postal stationery to convey information. These may be official, applied by the post-office during the cancellation process usually to promote national healthcare interests (as in "AIDS AWARENESS WEEK") or by private concerns to market a company, product or service. In countries such as the United States this practise is widely and profitably used and provides a fertile field of exploration to the thematic hobbyist (illustr 4).



Machine franking bearing the cachet "Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital"

What of my interests in medical philately? Having trodden the route of the generalist, I currently favour exploring the history of our profession. It is an on-going journey of exploration in which one understands again the received wisdom handed down by generations of academic authorities; and for me, it is an affirmation through philately of the inherent nobility of the profession. A former esteemed boss of mine, expressing surprise at hearing I collected stamps, told me that she had always thought philatelists "somewhat peculiar". I giggled (probably inanely). Whether I changed her mind or not, I never knew. However, in stamp collecting I have discovered a great form of release, a freedom of inexorable value. I can recommend it.

© 2008. Dr R M Pelteret. All rights reserved. www.pelteret.co.za

1996